

**FIRST MEETING OF THE WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS AT THE FIRST CONFERENCE  
OF THE PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY OF ECO COUNTRIES (PAECO)  
February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2013  
Islamabad**

The first meeting of Women Parliamentarians was held on the morning of February 10<sup>th</sup> at the Marriott Hotel, Islamabad. This was organised in line with the Article 4 (d) of the Agreed Charter of the PAECO that calls for a separate meeting of women delegates to the General Conference on the sidelines of the General Conference to discuss and propose women-related issues for consideration of the General Conference.

The theme of this first meeting was “Role of Women Parliamentarians in Strengthening Democracy and Social Justice in ECO Region.” Seven women parliamentarians from Pakistan attended the meeting while delegates from Turkey, Afghanistan, Iran and Kyrgyzstan represented their respective countries. These honorable delegates included: Madam Fatma Nur Serter MP (Turkey), Syed Ishaq Gillani Senior MP (Afghanistan), Mr. Ali Salaikpur(CHECK SPELLINGS) Counselor Iranian Embassy, and Mr. Kuban Toktorboev, Charge d'Affairs from Kyrgyz Embassy attended.

Chaired by **MNA Ms. Shahnaz Wazir** Ali from Pakistan, the Meeting opened with recitation from The Holy Quran. After a round of introductions, the Chair in her opening remarks welcomed the distinguished delegates and recalled the vision and endeavours of Speaker Dr. Fehmida Mirza in striving for the Parliamentary Assembly of ECO countries and ensuring that women parliamentarians are also given a special forum in the Assembly. She underscored the significant role and responsibility of women parliamentarians in strengthening democracy and social justice and hoped that this forum shall provide great opportunities to women parliamentarians in shaping the lives of women in ECO countries.

The Chair then passed the floor to Pakistani delegates for sharing their perspectives on the issue. **Senator Rubina Rauf Khalid** underscored the need for giving a meaningful role to women in order to achieve sustainable development in the ECO region. While recalling the role women in Pakistan including Fatima Jinnah, Nusrat Bhutto, and Benazir Bhutto, Senator Rubina stated that the struggle of such dynamic women not only provided strength to their leaderships but also helped in the women emancipation in Pakistan. The senator therefore emphasized on taking affirmative actions in order to provide equal opportunities for women to come at par with their male counterparts in the ECO countries.

**MNA Shireen Arshad** stated that women parliamentarians in our respective countries need to assume their due responsibility and should work towards women empowerment. She said that the ECO countries generally lacked proper infrastructure to create enabling environment for women entrepreneurs to flourish. However, this ECO forum has great potential and provides great opportunity to work collectively towards women's economic empowerment. Women consisting 51% of population of the ECO countries with around 61% involved in economic activities should be recognized as an ECO strength and asset that must be duly trained and educated. In this regard, MNA Shireen made the following recommendations:

- The ECO women parliamentarians must focus on education and trade as in these two particular areas lay the key for women's empowerment
- A separate 'Women's Trade Council' of PAECO should be constituted to focus on promoting women's entrepreneurship and mutual trade between women of ECO countries
- A general fund must be created to undertake productive economic activities aiming towards women's economic empowerment
- The meetings of women parliamentary committee of ECO should be held more frequently in order to do the initial spade work for this committee.
- A trade directory of women entrepreneurs of ECO countries must be developed.
- Skill training of our respective crafts must be undertaken by establishing skill centres within all ECO countries.

**Dr. Donya Aziz MNA** highlighted the significance of across party women caucuses as experienced by Pakistan. She highly recommended to set up similar women's parliamentary caucus within respective ECO parliaments. Referring to her experience she said that the women parliamentarians in Pakistan have been proactively participating in the legislative business. It was on record that 75% of legislation in the past five years was initiated by women parliamentarians. Women bring different perspective to legislative business and can influence their male colleagues in understanding and incorporating gender and human rights perspectives within the legislative business. Dr. Donya strongly recommended to ensure activity based cooperation within ECO forum.

**MNA Asiya Nasir** while quoting Margret Thatcher's famous words: '...to get a work done, tell a woman', said that women power cannot be undermined. She referred to Speaker Dr. Fehmida Mirza's dynamic leadership that had changed the perspective of legislative business in the Parliament of Pakistan. Under her Chairpersonship, it was for the first time that the women parliamentarians were given their due space in the business of the House.

MNA Asiya Nasir emphasized on the need to build peace first that provided enabling environment and a sense of confidence to undertake trade.

**MNA Qudsia Arshad** stressed on the need to live in peace and harmony and create a good peaceful neighborly environment amongst the ECO countries that would lead to establish social and economic justice.

**Surraya Asghar** lauded the ECO Women parliamentarians' forum as an opportunity to share experiences and learn best practices. She hoped that this would lead to closer ties between the women of ECO countries in many ways.

The floor was then passed on to guest delegates. The first to be invited to speak was **Madam Fatma Nur Serter**, MP from Turkey. **Madam Serter** after lauding the concept, vision and mission of the first conference of ECO Parliamentary Assembly

made the following recommendations for an improved working of the Women's Committee:

1. Agendas of all future meetings should be agreed in advance and pre-determined so that the participants come prepared for the meetings. This would help in focusing on the women issues more strategically.
2. We must have a network of women parliamentarians of the ECO countries that should meet up more frequently and should be able to influence this forum in a more positive way.

**Mr. Syed Ishaq Gillani**, Senior Member Parliament from **Afghanistan** fully endorsed the women parliamentarian's forum in the ECO Parliamentarian Assembly. He said that this forum will provide a great opportunity to our women parliamentarians to review our respective issues jointly and take actions to resolve those. Hence the potential and aspirations from this forum are abundant.

**Mr. Kuban Toktorboev**, Charge d'Affairs of **Kirgizstan** fully endorsed the Women's forum on behalf of his country. He also fully supported the earlier proposed trade council of women.

**Mr. Ali Salaikpur(CHECK SPELLINGS)** Counselor **Iranian** Embassy also extended full support to the forum on behalf of his country.

The meeting concluded with issuing a unanimously agreed joint statement that committed the women parliamentarians from ECO countries to extend full cooperation in:

- joining hands and raise a collective voice through initiating discourse and series of dialogue to address the emerging socio-economic needs and concerns of the women of the ECO countries;
- make concerted and collective efforts to position women for undertaking meaningful role at the policies and decision making levels within all spheres of the political and socio-economic development;
- emphasize on adopting special measures to promote women's economic, social and political progress within our respective countries
- evolve mechanisms that ensure positive and greater cooperation through launching ECO Women Parliamentarians Forum

The Meeting extended its gratitude to the Parliamentary Assembly of ECO Countries for deciding to incorporate such an initiative into its Charter and to encourage the holding of its first meeting as the first agenda item at its First Conference being held currently in Islamabad 10 – 13 February 2013.